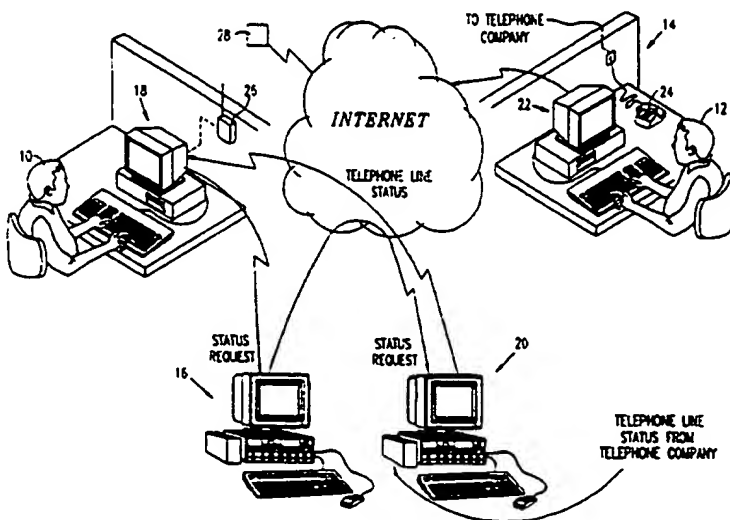




INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(51) International Patent Classification 6 : H04M 7/00, 3/22		A1	(11) International Publication Number: WO 99/08434
			(43) International Publication Date: 18 February 1999 (18.02.99)
(21) International Application Number: PCT/IL98/00294 (22) International Filing Date: 23 June 1998 (23.06.98) (30) Priority Data: 121501 8 August 1997 (08.08.97) IL (71) Applicant (for all designated States except US): MIRABILIS LTD. [IL/IL]; 9 Kehilat Saloniki Street, 69513 Tel Aviv (IL). (72) Inventors; and (75) Inventors/Applicants (for US only): VARDI, Joseph [IL/IL]; 12 Shamir Street, 69693 Tel Aviv (IL). VARDI, Arieh [IL/IL]; 29 Mercaz Ba'alei Melacha, 63824 Tel Aviv (IL). VIGISER, Josef [IL/IL]; 15 Havered Street, 45205 Hod Hasharon (IL). GOLDFINGER, Yair [IL/IL]; 5 Shoham Street, 69359 Tel Aviv (IL). (74) Agents: SANFORD, T., Colb et al.; P.O. Box 2273, 76122 Rehovot (IL).		(81) Designated States: AL, AM, AT, AT (Utility model), AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BY, CA, CH, CN, CU, CZ, CZ (Utility model), DE, DE (Utility model), DK, DK (Utility model), EE, EE (Utility model), ES, FI, FI (Utility model), GB, GE, GH, GM, GW, HU, ID, IL, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, NO, NZ, PL, PT, RO, RU, SD, SE, SG, SI, SK, SK (Utility model), SL, TJ, TM, TR, TT, UA, UG, US, UZ, VN, YU, ZW, ARIPO patent (GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, SD, SZ, UG, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, CH, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG). Published <i>With international search report.</i>	

(54) Title: TELEPHONE STATUS NOTIFICATION SYSTEM



(57) Abstract

A telephone line status notification system including at least one telephone line having a status, a communications network, at least one communications terminal which is connectable to the communications network and which is employable by a seeking user to communicate via the communications network a status request concerning the status of the at least one telephone line, apparatus for processing the status request, the apparatus for processing is connectable to the communications network for receiving the status request from the seeking user therethrough and communicating the request, and apparatus for acquiring the status of the at least one telephone line, the apparatus for acquiring is in communication with the apparatus for processing the receiving the status request therefrom, and the apparatus for acquiring is connectable to the communications network for communicating the status via the communications network.

FOR THE PURPOSES OF INFORMATION ONLY

Codes used to identify States party to the PCT on the front pages of pamphlets publishing international applications under the PCT.

AL	Albania	ES	Spain	LS	Lesotho	SI	Slovenia
AM	Armenia	FI	Finland	LT	Lithuania	SK	Slovakia
AT	Austria	FR	France	LU	Luxembourg	SN	Senegal
AU	Australia	GA	Gabon	LV	Latvia	SZ	Swaziland
AZ	Azerbaijan	GB	United Kingdom	MC	Monaco	TD	Chad
BA	Bosnia and Herzegovina	GE	Georgia	MD	Republic of Moldova	TG	Togo
BB	Barbados	GH	Ghana	MG	Madagascar	TJ	Tajikistan
BE	Belgium	GN	Guinea	MK	The former Yugoslav	TM	Turkmenistan
BF	Burkina Faso	GR	Greece		Republic of Macedonia	TR	Turkey
BG	Bulgaria	HU	Hungary	ML	Mali	TT	Trinidad and Tobago
BJ	Benin	IE	Ireland	MN	Mongolia	UA	Ukraine
BR	Brazil	IL	Israel	MR	Mauritania	UG	Uganda
BY	Belarus	IS	Iceland	MW	Malawi	US	United States of America
CA	Canada	IT	Italy	MX	Mexico	UZ	Uzbekistan
CF	Central African Republic	JP	Japan	NE	Niger	VN	Viet Nam
CG	Congo	KE	Kenya	NL	Netherlands	YU	Yugoslavia
CH	Switzerland	KG	Kyrgyzstan	NO	Norway	ZW	Zimbabwe
CI	Côte d'Ivoire	KP	Democratic People's	NZ	New Zealand		
CM	Cameroon		Republic of Korea	PL	Poland		
CN	China	KR	Republic of Korea	PT	Portugal		
CU	Cuba	KZ	Kazakhstan	RO	Romania		
CZ	Czech Republic	LC	Saint Lucia	RU	Russian Federation		
DE	Germany	LJ	Liechtenstein	SD	Sudan		
DK	Denmark	LK	Sri Lanka	SE	Sweden		
EE	Estonia	LR	Liberia	SG	Singapore		

TELEPHONE STATUS NOTIFICATION SYSTEM

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to telephone status notification systems in general, and more particularly to the use of computer networks to relay the status of one or more telephones.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

It is known to provide users connected via a computer terminal to a computer network with details of the network connection status of other users similarly connected. Applicant's U.S. Patent Application No. 08/791,437, incorporated herein by reference, discloses a system for providing a user with the network address, network connection status, and availability status of one or more users, to enable them, for example, to initiate a point to point connection with each other.

Public telephone systems, as presently constituted, generally only provide the status of a telephone at the time one attempts to establish a connection with it. Thus, one gets a busy signal, call waiting signal, or a ringing tone, etc. Some telephone carriers provide a service whereby a person who calls another party and receives a busy signal will be alerted when the telephone number called becomes available, but again status information is provided conditionally on having dialed a number previously. The ability to get an on-line report on the status of one or more telephone numbers automatically, or of receiving the logical status set by a user regarding his availability for a telephone call, as separate from its actual physical status, independent of the need to try to call the desired number, does not exist today among telephone carriers or telephone devices connected to the public telephone system, or the telephone line at home (as opposed to the carrier), or among telephone owners today. However, in general, all the necessary information exists or can be acquired, and can be made available by telephone carriers, by a telephone device which is connected to the system, or the telephone line at home which is connected to the public system, or by the telephone owner. PABXs and other specialized telephony systems such as call centers, telephony help desks, or Automatic Call Distribution Systems do possess the possibility of getting the status of their extensions, but while this information may be available to users connected to such systems by various known methods, it is not available to seeking users of the general public who are not subscribers or extensions of such systems.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention seeks to provide a system for requesting the status of a telephone line, recognizing the status, and passing on the status to one or more requesting computer network addresses. The system additionally provides for automatic call-back and conferencing once a telephone line's status has been determined.

There is thus provided in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention a telephone line status notification system including at least one telephone line having a status, a communications network, at least one communications terminal which is connectable to the communications network and which is employable by a seeking user to communicate via the communications network a status request concerning the status of the at least one telephone line, apparatus for processing the status request the apparatus for processing is connectable to the communications network for receiving the status request from the seeking user therethrough and communicating the request, and apparatus for acquiring the status of the at least one telephone line, the apparatus for acquiring is in communication with the apparatus for processing for receiving the status request therefrom, and the apparatus for acquiring is connectable to the communications network for communicating the status via the communications network.

Further in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the status request includes a unique identification of any of the users.

Still further in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention apparatus is included for identifying a network address associated with the unique identification.

Additionally in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention at least one server is included which is connectable to the communications network.

Moreover in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention either of the apparatus for acquiring and the apparatus for processing is resident in the at least one server.

Further in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the apparatus for processing is resident in the communications terminal employable by the seeking user.

Still further in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention a communications terminal employable by a sought user and connectable to the communications network is included.

Additionally in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention a telephone connectable to the telephone line is included.

Moreover in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the apparatus for acquiring is resident in the telephone.

5 Further in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the apparatus for acquiring is resident in the communications terminal employable by the sought user.

Still further in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the sought user communicates the status to the apparatus for acquiring via the communications terminal employable by the sought user.

10 Additionally in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the telephone line is part of a PABX system, and the status is communicated to a user not regularly connected to the PABX system..

Further in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention a cellular telephone in communication with the communications terminal employable by the seeking user is included.

15 Still further in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention a cellular telephone in communication with the communications terminal employable by the sought user is included.

20 Additionally in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the communications terminal employable by the seeking user is a cellular telephone.

Moreover in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the communications terminal employable by the sought user is a cellular telephone.

25 Further in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the communications terminal employable by the sought user is adapted to receive a call-back request from the seeking user and initiate a call to the seeking user via the telephone line.

Still further in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the seeking user has a telephone line status, and the communications terminal employable by the sought user is further adapted to initiate the call to the seeking user once the seeking user telephone line status has been determined.

30 Additionally in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the sought user has a telephone line status, and the communications terminal employable by the

sought user is further adapted to initiate the call to the seeking user once the sought user telephone line status has been determined.

Moreover in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the sought user has a telephone line status, the seeking user has a telephone line status, and the
5 communications terminal employable by the sought user is further adapted to initiate the call to the seeking user once either of the sought user telephone line status and the seeking user telephone line status has been determined.

Further in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention apparatus is included for conferencing connectable to the communications network and adapted to receive a
10 conferencing request from the seeking user and initiate a conference call between the seeking user and at least one sought user.

Still further in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the apparatus for conferencing is further adapted to first initiate a call to the seeking user and telephonically receive from the seeking user either of a telephone number of the sought user and
15 an identifier associated with a telephone number of the sought user.

Additionally in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the at least one sought user has a telephone line status, and the apparatus for conferencing is further adapted to initiate the conference call once the sought user telephone line status has been determined.

Moreover in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the
20 seeking user has a telephone line status, and the apparatus for conferencing is further adapted to initiate the conference call once the seeking user telephone line status has been determined.

Further in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the at least one seeking user has a telephone line status, the at least one sought user has a telephone line
25 status, and the apparatus for conferencing is further adapted to initiate the conference call once either of the seeking user telephone line status and the sought user telephone line status has been determined.

Still further in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the apparatus for acquiring maintains at least one telephone number associated with at least one
30 sought user.

Additionally in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the either of the apparatus for acquiring and the apparatus for processing includes apparatus for checking the status request from the seeking user for an authorization.

Moreover in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the
5 communications network is the Internet.

Further in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the cellular telephone is adapted to communicate using either of IP protocols and non-IP protocols.

There is additionally provided in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention a method for providing telephone line status, the method including providing at
10 least one telephone line having a status, providing a communications network, communicating via the communications network a status request from a seeking user, the status request concerning the status of the at least one telephone line, acquiring the status of the at least one telephone line, and communicating the status via the communications network, thereby providing the telephone line status.

Further in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the
15 communicating via the communications network a status request step includes communicating a unique identification of any of the users.

Still further in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the method includes identifying a network address associated with the unique identification.

20 Additionally in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the acquiring step includes acquiring the status of the at least one telephone line from a sought user.

Moreover in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the method includes the steps of receiving a call-back request from the seeking user at a sought user, and initiating a call-back to the seeking user from the sought user via the telephone line.

25 Further in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the method includes the steps of receiving a conferencing request from the seeking user, and initiating a conference call between the seeking user and at least one sought user.

Still further in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the
30 initiating step includes initiating once either of the seeking user's telephone line status and the sought user's telephone line status has been determined.

Additionally in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the acquiring step includes checking the status request from the seeking user for an authorization.

Moreover in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention the communicating the status step includes communicating the status to either of the seeking user and
5 a recipient indicated in the status request.

It is noted that throughout the specification and claims the phrase "status of a telephone," "status of a telephone number," or derivations and permutations thereof refer to whether a telephone line at a given telephone number is physically in use or not, or whether it is logically "in use" or not, that is, whether or not the end-user or owner of a telephone line wishes
10 to be contacted there through specifically by a telephone.

It is further noted that throughout the specification and claims the term "PABX" encompasses other specialized telephony systems such as call centers, telephony help desks, or Automatic Call Distribution Systems

It is further noted that throughout the specification and claims the term "user"
15 encompasses any entity, preferably human, that operates a computer or other communications terminal, preferably for the purpose of connecting to and communicating via a communications network. It is further noted that the term "seeking user" encompasses any user who requests the status of a telephone line. It is further noted that the term "sought user" encompasses any user whose telephone line status is desired by a seeking user. It is further noted that the term
20 "Internet" encompasses other communications systems using the Internet Protocol such as, but not limited to, "Intranet" and "Extranet" networks.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The present invention will be understood and appreciated from the following detailed description, taken in conjunction with the drawings in which:

25 Fig. 1 is a simplified block diagram of a telephone status notification system constructed and operative in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The present invention will be understood and appreciated more fully from the following detailed description wherein reference is made, purely by way of example, to the
30 following embodiments.

Reference is now made to Fig. 1 which is a simplified block diagram of a telephone status notification system constructed and operative in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention. A user 10 wishes to determine the status of a telephone line 14 associated with a user 12. User 10 typically sends a request for telephone line status information to a request server 16. The request typically comprises the telephone number, or other information identifying telephone line 14 associated with user 12. User 10 typically sends the request via a computer terminal 18 connectable to a communications network such as the Internet, the request being sent using known Internet protocols. It is appreciated that the request may be sent by user 10 using any known messaging means, or may be sent via client software running on computer terminal 18. User 10 may provide a list of such telephone numbers that is sent to the request server once for ongoing fulfillment or submitted each time user 10 connects to the Internet. Additionally or alternatively, user 10 may send individual telephone number status requests on an ad hoc basis for one-time fulfillment. Each request typically comprises information identifying one or more telephones by their number, owner's name, or by any other identification method. Request server 16 is typically connectable to the Internet and is capable of receiving the request of user 10. The request also preferably comprises a unique identification code and/or network address identifying user 10, and a unique identification code and/or network address to which the notification of the status of telephone line 14 is to be sent. The request may also comprise one or more telephone numbers associated with user 10. The request may also comprise a unique identification code and/or network address identifying user 12. Any of the network addresses described hereinabove may be user 10's or user 12's permanent IP address, should user 10 or user 12 possess one. Where user 10 or user 12 have a dynamic IP address, the network address may be identified by other identifying information, such as a permanent subscriber code with which the dynamic IP address is related in a given session. Where a unique identification code is used, apparatus may be provided to determine a network address associated therewith. An example of this is described with reference to Applicant's U.S. Patent Application No. 08/791,437.

Request server 16 then typically forwards the request to a telephone status acquirer 20, typically via the Internet. Telephone status acquirer 20 may be a server or other apparatus at a telephone company or other entity to which telephone line statuses may become known. It is appreciated that request server 16 and telephone status acquirer 20 may be housed within a single

server. It is further appreciated that request server 16 may be embodied within client software running on computer terminal 18, being capable of sending a request directly to the telephone status acquirer 16 as described hereinabove.

5 It is appreciated that telephone status acquirer 20 may be embodied within client software running on a computer terminal 22 used by user 12 that is connectable to the Internet. In this case, the client software typically determines the status of telephone line 14 by being in communication with a device that determines the on-hook/off-hook status of telephone line 14. The device may be attached to the telephone line (a line detector), connected directly to a telephone 24, be part of telephone 24 itself, or contained within computer terminal 22 to which
10 telephone 24 or telephone line 14 may be connected via any one of a number of well-known interface devices. Alternatively, the client software can be integrated with and reside in telephone 24. Alternatively, telephone line 14 may be a PABX extension. In this case, telephone status acquirer 20 acquires the status from a known and integral part of a PABX system configured to determine the status of telephone line 14, and then delivers the status, typically via the Internet or
15 other non-PABX connection, to requesting server 16, computer terminal 18, or whatever destination or destinations specified in user 10's request. User 12 may additionally or alternatively enter the physical status of telephone line 14 into the client software to indicate that telephone line 14 is busy, available, etc., and/or "logical" telephone statuses such as "available/not available for calls," or more detailed status information such as "available for calls, but only to the
20 following list of users..." and the like.

User 12 may additionally or alternatively enter one or more telephone numbers with which user 12 is associated into the client software. Should user 10 not know with which telephone number user 12 is associated, or otherwise not wish to refer to user 12 by a telephone number, user 10 may include information in his request identifying user 12 by means other than a
25 telephone number. In this case, the status returned typically includes a telephone number or numbers entered by user 12 into client software as described hereinabove. Alternatively, user 10 may request the statuses of telephone numbers user 12 uses regularly, typically with telephone status acquirer 20 or request server 16 storing one or more telephone numbers recently used by user 12.

30 Requesting server 16 or telephone status acquirer 20 may be provided with means for checking the authorization of user 10 to request the status of telephone line 14 before divulging

such. For example, the status may only be divulged if user 10 possesses a certain security rating or a certain level of account, or if user 10 provides a given password.

In response to the request forwarded from request server 16, telephone status acquirer 20 preferably sends the requested status information to the destination address or addresses indicated by user 10. It is appreciated that user 10's request may specify different destinations depending on the nature of the status determination.

User 10 may alternatively input telephone line status requests into a cellular telephone 26. In this case, the cellular telephone company, or the Internet Service Provider with which cellular telephone 26 is in contact, typically forwards the request to request server 16 as described hereinabove. Client software may reside in cellular telephone 26. Cellular telephone 26 may additionally be connected to the Internet or other communications network. The client software residing in cellular telephone 26 typically generally functions as described hereinabove with reference to computer terminal 18, with telephone status information preferably being displayed on cellular telephone 26's display. It is appreciated that request server 16 may be embodied within client software running on cellular telephone 26 being capable of sending a request directly to the telephone status acquirer 16 as described hereinabove. It is further appreciated that cellular telephone 26 may be used alone or in combination with computer terminal 18, and that cellular telephone 26 may communicate using IP or other protocols.

User 12 may additionally or alternatively communicate via a cellular telephone, which may comprise any of the client software and functionality described herein with reference to computer terminal 22 and telephone 24. It is appreciated that the cellular telephone of user 12 may be used alone or in combination with computer terminal 22 and telephone 24, and that the cellular telephone of user 12 may communicate using IP or other protocols.

It is appreciated that the client software described hereinabove with reference to the cellular telephones of users 10 and 12 may reside in a computer located remotely from the cellular telephone. In this case, communication between the cellular telephones of users 10 and 12 and the client may use IP or other protocols.

It will be appreciated that a notification system as described hereinabove may be used to provide other kinds of status information, for example the statuses of monitors, sensors, or measuring apparatus and/or logical statuses input by the user. It will be further appreciated that a notification system as described hereinabove may be used in conjunction with IP telephones

designed for use with the Internet, where the IP telephones comprise computer circuitry and voice processing capability. In addition, a notification and acquisition system as described hereinabove may be used in conjunction with communication devices using CATV as part of the network infrastructure.

5 It is appreciated that once user 10 receives telephone number and other status information associated with user 12 as described hereinabove, or once it is stored in his client software, user 10 may send a request to computer terminal 22, typically via the Internet, for a telephone call to be placed from user 12 to user 10. Client software residing in computer terminal 22 may automatically place a call to user 10 either immediately, or when the telephone line
10 statuses of user 10 and/or user 12 become known to computer terminal 22.

User 10 may alternatively send a request, typically via the Internet, to an operator or an automatic telephone switch 28 to initiate two calls, one to user 10 and one to user 12, and conference the two calls using known conferencing means. User 10 typically can configure his client software to send the telephone numbers for himself and for user 12, or other means of
15 identifying user 10 and user 12, in addition to billing information indicating who should be billed for the call, along with proper authorization. User 10 may request a conference call with more than one user by sending multiple telephone numbers and/or identifiers in this manner. User 10 may additionally indicate if a conference call is to be tried immediately, with calls to be conferenced-in as the specified telephone numbers become available, or tried only when all the
20 telephone numbers requested for a conference are known to be available, such as through requesting the status of the telephone numbers as described hereinabove. User 10 may also initiate a call back, delivering his telephone number and availability to an automated switch, to be conferenced with one of the switch's outgoing dialing lines. User 10 may additionally indicate if a call back is to be tried immediately or tried only when the telephone number with which the call
25 back is concerned is known to be available, such as through requesting the status of the telephone number as described hereinabove.

It is appreciated that various features of the invention which are, for clarity, described in the context of separate embodiments may also be provided in combination in a single embodiment. Conversely, various features of the invention which are, for brevity, described in the
30 context of a single embodiment may also be provided separately or in any suitable combination.

It will be appreciated by persons skilled in the art that the present invention is not limited to what has been particularly shown and described hereinabove. Rather, the scope of the present invention is defined only by the claims that follow:

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A telephone line status notification system comprising:
at least one telephone line having a status;
5 a communications network;
at least one communications terminal which is connectable to said communications network and which is employable by a seeking user to communicate via said communications network a status request concerning said status of said at least one telephone line;
apparatus for processing said status request wherein said apparatus for processing is
10 connectable to said communications network for receiving said status request from said seeking user therethrough and communicating said request; and
apparatus for acquiring said status of said at least one telephone line, wherein said apparatus for acquiring is in communication with said apparatus for processing for receiving said status request therefrom, and wherein said apparatus for acquiring is connectable to said
15 communications network for communicating said status via said communications network.
2. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 1 wherein said status request comprises a unique identification of any of said users.
- 20 3. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 2 and further comprising apparatus for identifying a network address associated with said unique identification.
4. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 1 and further comprising at least one server which is connectable to said communications network.
25
5. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 4 wherein either of said apparatus for acquiring and said apparatus for processing is resident in said at least one server.
6. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 1 wherein said
30 apparatus for processing is resident in said communications terminal employable by said seeking user.

7. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 1 and further comprising a communications terminal employable by a sought user and connectable to said communications network.

5 8. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 1 and further comprising a telephone connectable to said telephone line.

9. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 8 wherein said
10 apparatus for acquiring is resident in said telephone.

10. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 7 wherein said
apparatus for acquiring is resident in said communications terminal employable by said sought
user.

15 11. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 10 and wherein said
sought user communicates said status to said apparatus for acquiring via said communications
terminal employable by said sought user.

20 12. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 1 wherein said
telephone line is part of a PABX system, and wherein said status is communicated to a user not
regularly connected to said PABX system..

13. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 1 and further
25 comprising a cellular telephone in communication with said communications terminal employable
by said seeking user.

14. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 7 and further
comprising a cellular telephone in communication with said communications terminal employable
30 by said sought user.

15. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 1 wherein said communications terminal employable by said seeking user is a cellular telephone.

16. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 7 wherein said communications terminal employable by said sought user is a cellular telephone.

17. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 7 wherein said communications terminal employable by said sought user is adapted to receive a call-back request from said seeking user and initiate a call to said seeking user via said telephone line.

18. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 17 wherein said seeking user has a telephone line status, and wherein said communications terminal employable by said sought user is further adapted to initiate said call to said seeking user once said seeking user telephone line status has been determined.

19. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 17 wherein said sought user has a telephone line status, and wherein said communications terminal employable by said sought user is further adapted to initiate said call to said seeking user once said sought user telephone line status has been determined.

20. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 17 wherein said sought user has a telephone line status, wherein said seeking user has a telephone line status, and wherein said communications terminal employable by said sought user is further adapted to initiate said call to said seeking user once either of said sought user telephone line status and said seeking user telephone line status has been determined.

21. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 1 and further comprising apparatus for conferencing connectable to said communications network and adapted to receive a conferencing request from said seeking user and initiate a conference call between said seeking user and at least one sought user.

22. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 21 wherein said apparatus for conferencing is further adapted to first initiate a call to said seeking user and telephonically receive from said seeking user either of a telephone number of said sought user and an identifier associated with a telephone number of said sought user.

23. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 21 wherein said at least one sought user has a telephone line status, and wherein said apparatus for conferencing is further adapted to initiate said conference call once said sought user telephone line status has been determined.

24. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 21 wherein said seeking user has a telephone line status, and wherein said apparatus for conferencing is further adapted to initiate said conference call once said seeking user telephone line status has been determined.

25. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 21 wherein said at least one seeking user has a telephone line status, wherein said at least one sought user has a telephone line status, and wherein said apparatus for conferencing is further adapted to initiate said conference call once either of said seeking user telephone line status and said sought user telephone line status has been determined.

26. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 1 wherein said apparatus for acquiring maintains at least one telephone number associated with at least one sought user.

27. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 1 and wherein either of said apparatus for acquiring and said apparatus for processing comprises apparatus for checking said status request from said seeking user for an authorization.

28. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 1 wherein said communications network is the Internet.

29. A telephone line status notification system according to claim 13 wherein said cellular telephone is adapted to communicate using either of IP protocols and non-IP protocols.

30. A method for providing telephone line status, the method comprising:
5 providing at least one telephone line having a status;
providing a communications network;
communicating via said communications network a status request from a seeking user, said status request concerning said status of said at least one telephone line;
acquiring said status of said at least one telephone line; and
10 communicating said status via said communications network, thereby providing said telephone line status.

31. A method according to claim 30 wherein said communicating via said communications network a status request step comprises communicating a unique identification
15 of any of said users.

32. A method according to claim 31 and further comprising identifying a network address associated with said unique identification.

20 33. A method according to claim 30 wherein said acquiring step comprises acquiring said status of said at least one telephone line from a sought user.

34. A method according to claim 30 and further comprising the steps of:
receiving a call-back request from said seeking user at a sought user; and
25 initiating a call-back to said seeking user from said sought user via said telephone line.

35. A method according to claim 30 and further comprising the steps of:
receiving a conferencing request from said seeking user; and
initiating a conference call between said seeking user and at least one sought user.
30

36. A method according to claim 34 wherein said initiating step comprises initiating once either of said seeking user's telephone line status and said sought user's telephone line status has been determined.

5 37. A method according to any of claim 30 wherein said acquiring step comprises checking said status request from said seeking user for an authorization.

38. A method according to any of claim 30 wherein said communicating said status step
10 comprises communicating said status to either of said seeking user and a recipient indicated in said status request.

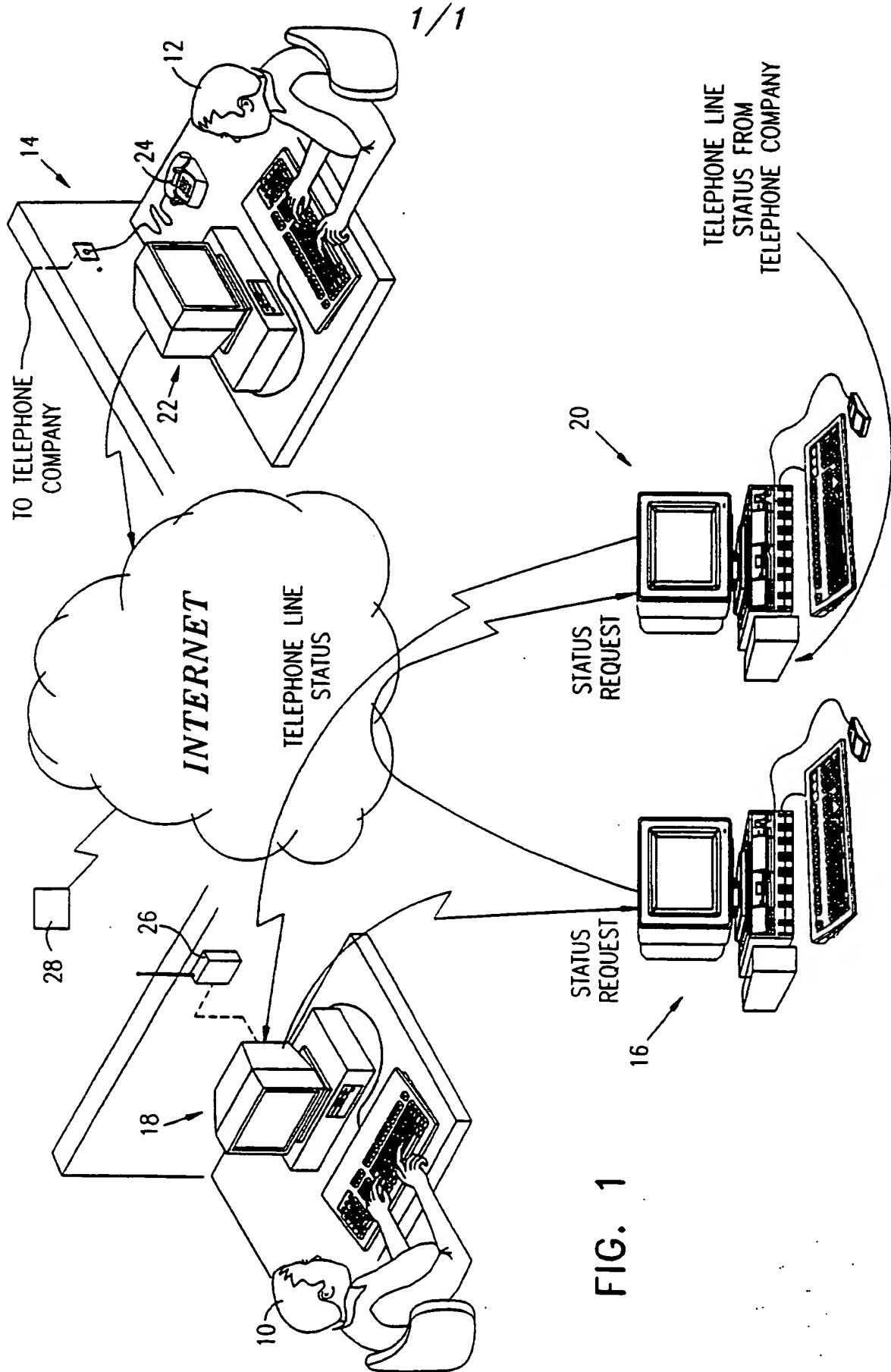


FIG. 1

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No

PCT/IL 98/00294

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC 6 H04M7/00 H04M3/22

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC 6 H04M

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	WO 97 14234 A (NETSPEAK CORPORATION) 17 April 1997 see page 16, line 12 - page 17, line 6 ---	1,7,13, 16,26, 28,30,33
X	US 5 533 110 A (PINARD ET AL.) 2 July 1996 see column 2, line 47 - line 58 ---	1,30
P,X	WO 97 46955 A (AT & T CORP.) 11 December 1997 see page 3, line 14 - page 4, line 7 -----	1,28

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.

☒ Patent family members are listed in annex.

* Special categories of cited documents :

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

"E" earlier document but published on or after the international filing date

"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)

"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art.

"Z" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

25 November 1998

Date of mailing of the international search report

03/12/1998

Name and mailing address of the ISA

European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patendaan 2
NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk
Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Tx. 31 651 epo nl.
Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016

Authorized officer

Toussaint, F

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

Intern: al Application No

PCT/IL 98/00294

Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
WO 9714234 A	17-04-1997	AU 7247696 A CA 2231127 A EP 0852868 A	30-04-1997 17-04-1997 15-07-1998
US 5533110 A	02-07-1996	CA 2163948 A DE 19543870 A GB 2295747 A	30-05-1996 30-05-1996 05-06-1996
WO 9746955 A	11-12-1997	NONE	